



Living Together as One

How Are Your Relationships Going?

When I went away to college, I was going sight unseen. I had never been on the campus and had not even been to the state where it was located. My first night in my dorm room I was overwhelmed by loneliness. I missed desperately my family and friends and without a roommate, I woke up the next morning not knowing anyone there. Yet quickly I met friends and in a short amount of time I was amazed by the closeness of my friendships there and how amazing it was to share a common bond with Christ across so many relationships. It seemed like I had gained a taste of heaven spiritually and relationally. For the first time in my life I was surrounded by people my age who also had a deep hunger for God and wanted to make the changes in their lives that would bring them close to Him. We use in Christian circles the term fellowship to describe what I was experiencing back then, and it was intoxicating.

John the Apostle in talking about life together with Jesus wrote, **"that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.** (1 John 1: 2-3 CSB)

There are two main points to make about what John says here. First, and this will be difficult to unwrap is John's profound and provocative comment about Christ. Take note of this. **'that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—** Did you catch it? Eternal life is Jesus Christ. He puts it even more strongly at the end of this letter. **And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know the true one. We are in the true one—that is, in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.** (1 John 5: 20 CSB) Eternal life is not a place or a timeline or even an experience. Eternal life is Jesus Christ connected to you, a part of you. When you put your hope in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and salvation, you have eternal life because He immediately becomes a part of you. All the aspects of the Sermon on the Mount which describe how one is when they have eternal life is there for you, within sight of how you will live. Read Matthew 5-7 and you will see what sort of person you will eventually be with Christ in your life. It is an amazing journey you and anyone else who has in faith trusted Jesus Christ for salvation will take. A perfect life full of love, peace and joy is on the horizon for you. Love your enemies? Yes you will. Forgive those who trample on you? That too! Not judging others or being anxious about anything? That is exactly what is in your future if you aren't already living that life right now. Eternal life is Jesus Christ living in you and through you and it just gets better and better as you put your life in His hands.

The second point John makes is less difficult to see but just as profound. Jesus Christ, eternal life, brings you into fellowship with others who have salvation and with God. This is much more than friendship or being together. Fellowship is the translation of the Greek term, *koinonia* and it has deep and tough to translate implications. John reminds you that there is *koinonia* that exists between you and others who have put their hope in Jesus Christ for salvation. More than that, *koinonia* exists between you and God, as well as of course between the Father and the Son. *Koinonia* in the Bible is a technical term that speaks of oneness, of union. There is a joining together in *koinonia* that in John's description is supernatural, put together by God.

Marriage is the closest approximation to *koinonia* we find in common life. Jesus, when asked about divorce quoted the Old Testament statement made by God when He brought Adam and Eve together as husband and wife. **"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and**

female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Matthew 19: 4-6 NIV) There is koinonia that exists between husbands and wives that is brought about by the Lord Himself. That is why great psychological and spiritual wreckage occurs in each part of the union when the marriage falls apart. Something miraculous, supernatural takes place when a man and woman come together in marriage and regardless of their religion or lack of faith in God, the Lord Himself joins them and that union is intense and life altering. When John the Baptist tried to explain to one of his disciples why it did not bother him that so many people were turning away from him and following Jesus he used the metaphor of a bride and groom to explain what needed to happen. **To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.** (John 3: 27-30 NIV) Nothing in our experience can quite describe the closeness of the relationship between Christ and those who choose Him as Savior, but John the Baptist said a marriage might be one way to understand it.

It is difficult to come up with a way of indicating just what the koinonia is like between one true Christian and another, at least as it is intended and will one day come to be. I like to imagine it and perhaps you do too as what we see in the ancient book of Ruth. Ruth was a young widow, her mother-in-law an older widow. Naomi was too heartbroken to stay in the foreign land where she and her husband had immigrated years before. She wanted to go back home. We speak of comfort food as being something that takes the edge off being sick or discouraged or even depressed. Home, although it probably had changed a lot since she left, was where she longed to return. Ruth who was a Moabite and had never been to Israel refused to let Naomi go without her. Much has been made of Ruth leaving behind her family and her sacrifice to relocate with Naomi to Bethlehem, but I think it is a mistake to not see this from a different point of view. The true sacrifice for Ruth would have been for her to let Naomi leave without her. That would have been too much for her to bear. When Naomi tried to convince Ruth to stay, Ruth made it crystal clear what sort of life she wanted. Ruth was too attached to Naomi to say goodbye. **But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."** (Ruth 1: 16-17 NIV)

If you want to understand the Bible's take on fellowship, on koinonia, that is nearly a perfect description of how it looks in real life. The union of two or more people in purpose, values, and love for one another is fellowship as God intends it. Perhaps the most profound explanation of how fellowship will one day become is what Jesus Himself has said of it. **I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name — the name you gave me — so that they may be one as we are one.** (John 17: 11 NIV) Talking about His people, Jesus in His conversation with the Father just before He was crucified laid out the dimensions of koinonia or fellowship as it will one day become. You and every other believer are going to be just as much one as the Father and Son are one. We cannot begin to speculate how that will look when it is completed but that is an amazing revelation. However close Jesus is to the Father is how close you will be to any other true Christian you know...or do not yet know. Imagine a world with no war, no arguing, no jealousy or unforgiveness, no held grudges, no anger, no lying and no disappointment with others. A world where we not only get along, we love each other and trust each other and have nothing but joy being together. That is what you can look forward to having soon enough. All because Jesus is your Savior.